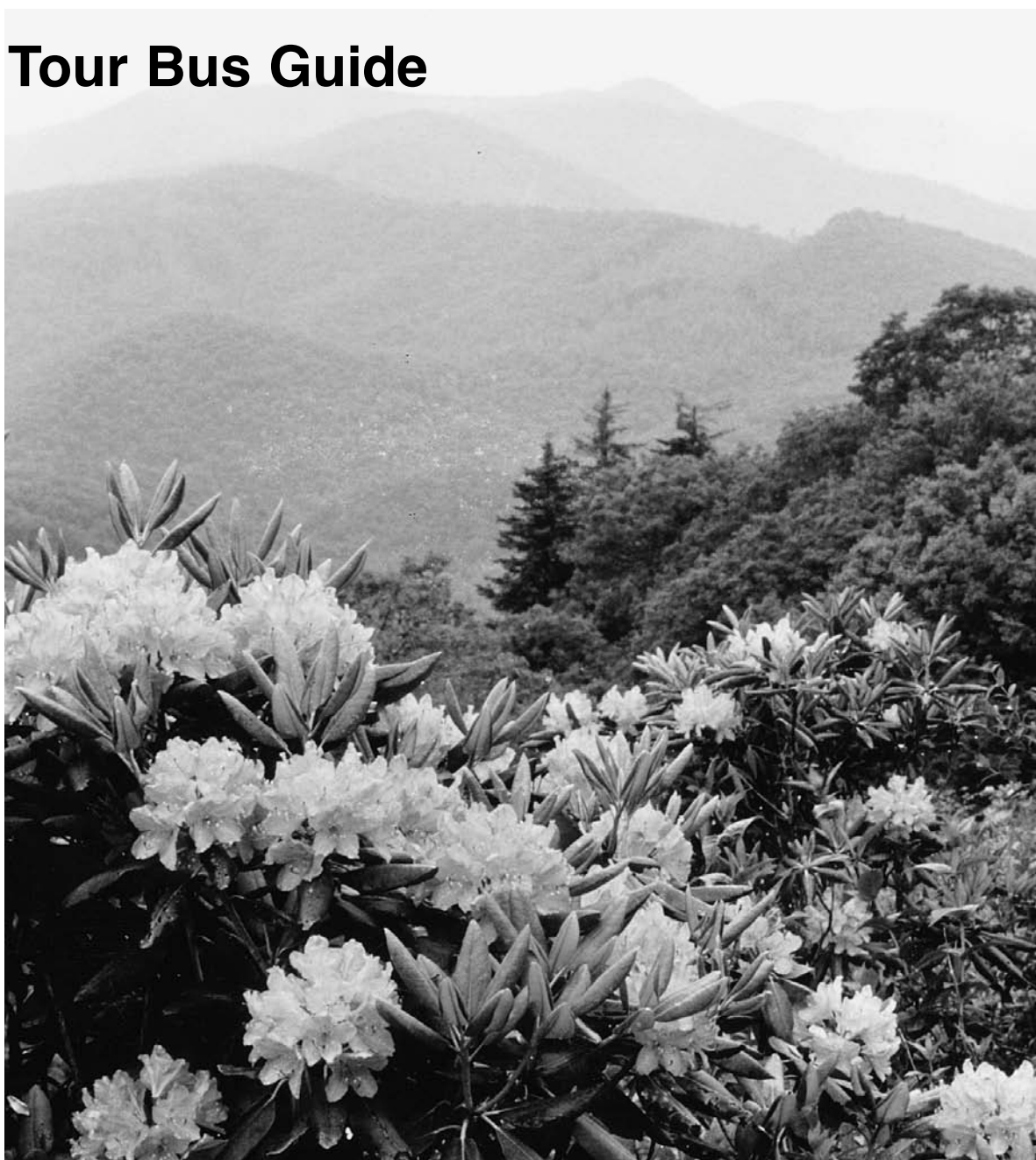


**Great Smoky Mountains
National Park**

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Tour Bus Guide



General Information



Pink lady's slipper orchid.

Great Smoky Mountains National Park is the largest deciduous forest wilderness area in the eastern United States. The park contains over 800 square miles of land and provides a sanctuary for a rich diversity of plant and animal species. The park also provides a place to find a change from the sights and sounds of our everyday surroundings.

For further information about the roads in the park, you may want to purchase *The Smokies Road Guide*. This publication can be found at any visitor center in the park and offers detailed descriptions of what you might see while touring the park roads. The park staff wishes you a safe and enjoyable visit to Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

HIKING

Hiking is a popular activity on the park's 832 miles of maintained trails. Even though most bus tour groups do not have time for hiking, there are trails identified as "self-guiding nature trails" and "quiet walkways" which are good for short walks. Generally from one-half to one mile in length, these paths offer your passengers the opportunity to experience the Smokies wilderness. The Sugarlands Valley Nature Trail is accessible to all visitors.

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

- Smokies Road Guide · \$11.95
- Exploring the Smokies: Things to See & Do in Great Smoky Mountains National Park · \$9.95
- Newfound Gap Road Auto Tour booklet · \$1
- Smoky Mountains Audio Tour: The Newfound Gap Road · Free Podcast

- Cades Cove Auto Tour booklet · \$1
- Oconaluftee Mountain Farm Museum self-guiding booklet · \$1
- Great Smoky Mountains Starter Kit · Includes eight maps and tour booklets · \$5



**TO ORDER CALL (865) 436-7318 OR LOG ONTO
WWW.SMOKIESINFORMATION.ORG**

Visitor Centers

All of the park visitor centers have adequate bus parking. There is no admission fee. The visitor centers offer information services, restrooms, and drinking fountains. Books, film, postcards, maps, and other sales items may be purchased at all three locations.

Sugarlands: Located two miles inside the park at the Gatlinburg, Tennessee, entrance. A designated bus parking lot is located adjacent to the automobile parking areas. Walking distance is about 100 yards. Minimum time for bus tour stops should be 30 minutes. Sugarlands Visitor Center is open daily, except Christmas, from 8:00 - 4:30, with extended spring-fall hours. A free 20-minute park film shows every 30 minutes on the hour and half hour.



Left: Park information is available at Sugarlands Visitor Center daily from 8:00 - 4:30.

Below: The Davis-Queen House is part of a collection of authentic farm structures at the Mountain Farm Museum, located beside Oconaluftee Visitor Center.



PHOTOS: MARY ANN KRESSIG

Cades Cove: Located at the halfway point on the Cades Cove Loop Road near the Cable Mill. There are exhibits, historic structures, and a water-powered grist mill. Minimum stopping time should be about 30 minutes. Open daily, except Christmas. Hours generally are 9:00 - 6:00.



Rangers give programs on the history of the mountains.



Oconaluftee: Located one mile inside the park at the Cherokee, North Carolina entrance. There are exhibits and the Mountain Farm Museum with a self-guiding booklet. Minimum time for bus tour stops should be 45 minutes. **Buses are requested to park in the south parking area and to shut off their engines.** Oconaluftee Visitor Center is open daily, except Christmas Day. Hours generally are 8:00 - 4:30, with extended summer hours.

Driving Tips



Morning clouds shroud the valley below Newfound Gap.

If you have not driven in the mountains before, there may be some hazards that are not obvious. These tips are offered to familiarize you with mountain driving and to prevent unnecessary delays and possible accidents.

1. Overheating brakes are a major problem in mountain driving. If you find that you are constantly riding the brakes, shift to a lower gear. This is best accomplished prior to descending mountain roads. In general, a vehicle will require the same gear while traveling downhill as it would while traveling up the same road. Unless you are an experienced driver, it can be dangerous to shift to a lower gear once the vehicle has started the descent.

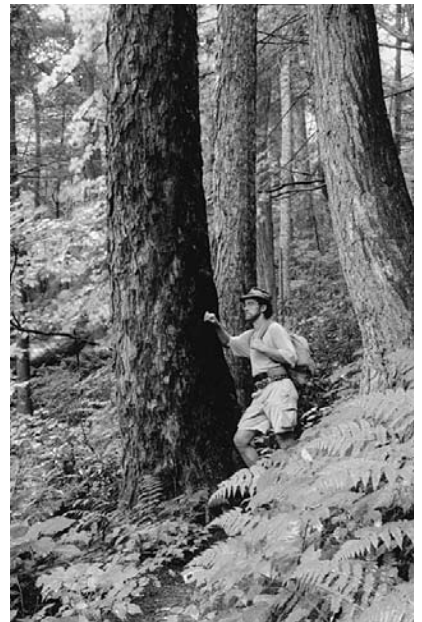
Proper tire pressure is important to prevent heat build up on tires while negotiating the many curves on park roads.

Vapor lock, engine or transmission overheating, or radiator boil over can all be caused by long steady ascents. Usually a 30 minute cool down period will alleviate the problem.

2. Consider stopping at scenic vistas while traveling. Not only does this allow your passengers more opportunity to view the park, it also allows your brakes to cool while traveling downhill. Occasionally pulling over while traveling uphill will give other motorists an opportunity to pass and might prevent impatient drivers from passing at dangerous locations.

3. Weather in the mountains will vary with the elevation. The lower elevations will often be warm and clear. But at the higher altitudes it may be cool, raining, snowing, or foggy. Thick fog is more likely to occur in the early morning and at night. Falling rocks are common after heavy rains.

4. Buses are prohibited from idling engines in parking lots of developed areas.



Great Smoky Mountains National Park boasts thousands of acres of virgin forest.

Newfound Gap Road - Tennessee

Newfound Gap Road (US 441) TN to NC: This is a two-lane paved road with two-way traffic. It is approximately 15 miles from Sugarlands Visitor Center to Newfound Gap, which is normally a 30 minute drive nonstop. The elevation change is 3,500 feet with an average grade of 5%. The road is moderately winding, except for the last three miles which has many sharp curves. Use lower gears when descending from Newfound Gap.

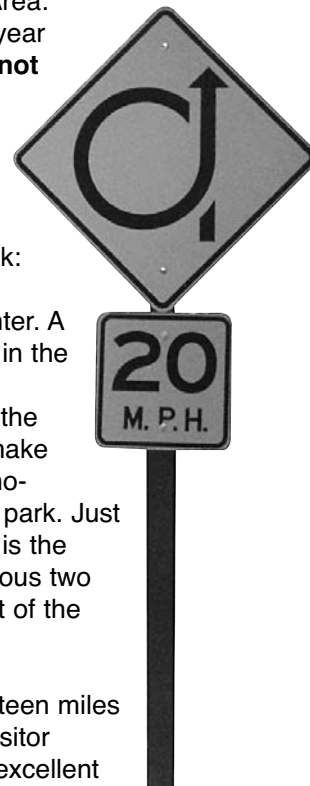
This transmountain road has many scenic overlooks. The following are suggested stops while traveling from Gatlinburg or Cherokee:

Chimney Tops Picnic Area: A day-use area, open year round. **Buses should not enter**, as sharp curves through the picnic area are impossible to negotiate.

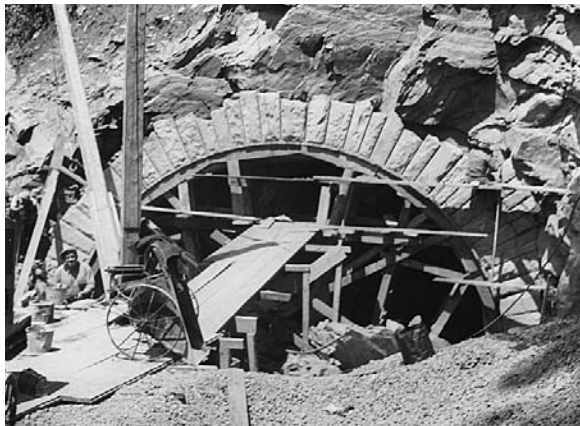
Chimney Tops Overlook: Seven miles south of Sugarlands Visitor Center. A variety of green colors in the spring, rhododendron blooming in June, and the fall colors in October make this one of the most photographed spots in the park. Just beyond the first tunnel is the trailhead for the strenuous two mile hike to the summit of the Chimneys.

Morton Overlook: Fourteen miles south of Sugarlands Visitor Center. This offers an excellent view of the steep, rugged terrain and the Sugarlands Valley below. This overlook is usually crowded and may not have adequate bus parking.

Newfound Gap: Fifteen miles south of Sugarlands Visitor Center. The gap is a major overlook with a large parking area. Located on the crest of the Smokies, there are excellent views into the North Carolina side of the park. Restrooms and drinking water are available all year. The Appalachian Trail that extends from Georgia to Maine crosses the parking area. Elevation at Newfound Gap is 5,046 feet.



GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK



Members of the Civilian Conservation Corps construct a tunnel on Newfound Gap Road.

Campbell Overlook: Two miles south of Sugarlands Visitor Center. Excellent views of Sugarlands Valley and surrounding mountains. Several major forest types are visible from this point. The change in the appearance of the forest as you drive from Gatlinburg to Newfound Gap is approximately equivalent to the 1,000 mile drive from Georgia to Maine.

Newfound Gap Road - North Carolina

Clingmans Dome Road: A seven mile side road from Newfound Gap leads to the parking area for the hike to Clingmans Dome, the park's highest peak at 6,643 feet. Traffic is usually heavy, and parking is congested at times. Along this road the plant life is similar to that of New England and southeastern Canada. Open April 1 – November 30.

Clingmans Dome Parking Area: This is the highest point in the park that can be reached by vehicle, elevation 6,310 feet. A paved trail leads from the parking area to an observation tower. This one mile round trip walk will take a minimum of one hour. It is a steep and strenuous hike that has an elevation gain of 300 feet and an 8% grade. It is recommended only for those persons who are in good physical condition. Restrooms and drinking water are available near the parking area. The parking area is large with a turnaround that is adequate for buses.

Thomas Divide Overlooks: Several large pull-outs on the Newfound Gap Road south of Newfound Gap provide panoramic views of distant mountains. The pristine oak forests along the ridges and the cove hardwoods in the valleys are an outstanding view.

Collins Creek Picnic Area: A day-use area open late March through October. Roads are wide enough for tour buses.

Mingus Mill: A restored water-powered grist mill located one-half mile north of Oconaluftee Visitor Center which is about 16 miles south of Newfound Gap. The mill is in operation spring through fall, generally 9:00-5:00. There is a large parking area with adequate space to maneuver by backing. Allow passengers 30 – 45 minutes to tour the area. Restrooms are available.

Observation tower at Clingmans Dome.



Little River Road

H. E. SIEMAN



WILLIAM LEA



LAURENCE PRINGLE

Left: Great Smoky Mountain National Park has over 2,100 miles of streams. *Top right:* Trillium and fringed phacelia bloom in profusion along a trail. *Bottom right:* Maidenhair ferns grow in moist woodland areas.

Little River Road: This road follows the Little River west toward Cades Cove and Townsend. The tumbling cascades of the river parallel the road for about 13 miles. An elevation gain of approximately 730 feet is achieved by the time you reach Fighting Creek Gap, three miles west of Sugarlands Visitor Center.

The road has numerous curves and rock overhangs that may appear to be closer to the road than they actually are, and drivers have a tendency to cross over the center line. Be assured that the vertical clearance is sufficient. Motor vehicle code requires vehicles to remain to the right of the center line.

Adequate places to stop buses along this road are limited. The following are suggested stops:

Maloney Point Overlook: Three miles west of Sugarlands Visitor Center. This overlook offers scenic views of the valley looking east toward Gatlinburg and a sweeping panorama of the peaks and ridges that lead up to the 6,593 foot summit of Mt. Le Conte. The variety of trees, such as pine, oak, hickory, maple, tuliptree, and hemlock, provide great color contrast in the early spring and again in autumn.

Metcalf Bottoms Picnic Area: A day-use area, open all year. Restrooms are available.

Townsend "Wye": Eighteen miles west of Sugarlands Visitor Center. Little River Road goes on to Townsend, Tennessee which is two miles from the "Wye." Laurel Creek Road leads seven miles to Cades Cove.

Cades Cove Loop Road

JERRY MULLIS



Historic buildings, including homes, barns, churches and a working grist mill, line the Cades Cove Loop Road.

Cades Cove: The 11 mile paved loop road that circles the cove will accommodate buses. The traffic flow can be slow and congested, and there are often numerous pedestrians and bicyclists. Traveling the loop is comparable to visiting a landlocked community of the 1800s. Churches, barns, homes, and other restored buildings reflect a southern Appalachian heritage where the philosophy was “make do or do without.”

A self-guiding auto tour leaflet is available at the entrance to the loop road. Driving time will average one to two hours depending on traffic conditions. Small parking areas are located near historic buildings. **In most instances, these are not adequate for buses.**

The major stopping point on the loop is the Cades Cove Visitor Center. Located nearby is a water-powered grist mill that is in operation (spring through fall). Minimum stopping time at the Cable Mill area should be about 30 minutes.

Buses are not permitted on Rich Mountain Road or Parson Branch Road. These are one-way unpaved roads that lead out of the cove. There are also two lanes that cut across the cove, Sparks Lane and Hyatt Lane. **These are narrow gravel roads and are not recommended for buses.**

Near the entrance/exit of the loop road are the campground, comfort station, grocery store, horse stable, bicycle rental, and picnic area. **Large buses should not enter the picnic area, but they may park in the nearby parking areas.**



White-tailed deer can often be seen in Cades Cove.

WILLIAM LEA

Other Roads

Blue Ridge Parkway: This 469-mile scenic parkway winds along the crest of the Blue Ridge from Great Smoky Mountains National Park to Shenandoah National Park. Facilities are located along the route. Driving time for the length of the Parkway is at least three days. Tour buses are permitted. Please call (828) 298-0398 or (828) 271-4779 for information about the road, including tunnel height and temporary closures.

Foothills Parkway - East End: A six mile spur that connects I-40 and US 321 near Cosby, Tennessee. It begins 21 miles south of the I-40/I-81 interchange. This short trip up and over Green Mountain offers good views.

Foothills Parkway - West End: An 18 mile drive that follows the crest of Chilhowee Mountain. Begins at US 321, nine miles from

the park entrance at Townsend. The terminus is at Chilhowee Reservoir on US 129, 22 miles south of Maryville, Tennessee. This end of the parkway has excellent views and an observation tower is located at the halfway point at Look Rock.

Heintooga Ridge Road: This spur off the Blue Ridge Parkway near the Oconaluftee Visitor Center offers views along the ridge. Buses are prohibited from traveling beyond the Heintooga Picnic Area. Open mid-May through October.

Lakeview Drive: This paved road climbs up into the park from Bryson City. Overlooks provide glistening views of Fontana Lake in the valley below.

Group Camp Sites: Campgrounds with group camp sites have adequate roads for buses.



Civilian
Conservation
Corps stone
masons take a break
from work on a bridge in
the park. Photo: Great Smoky
Mountains National Park.

Great Smoky Mountains National Park is one of the largest protected land areas east of the Rocky Mountains. With over 500,000 acres of forest, the Smokies contain an enormous variety of plants and animals. In terms of biological diversity, a walk from mountain foot to peak is often compared to the 2,000 mile hike on the Appalachian Trail from Georgia to Maine.

The Smokies also have a rich cultural history. Cherokee Indians moved into the area about 1,000 years ago, and permanent white settlement began around 1800. Most families depended on farming for their livelihood. Life for many of these families changed with the coming of commercial logging operations around 1900 that stripped trees from two-thirds of what is now park land. Established in 1934, the park was created from thousands of tracts of private and commercial land that was bought with money raised by public and private donations.

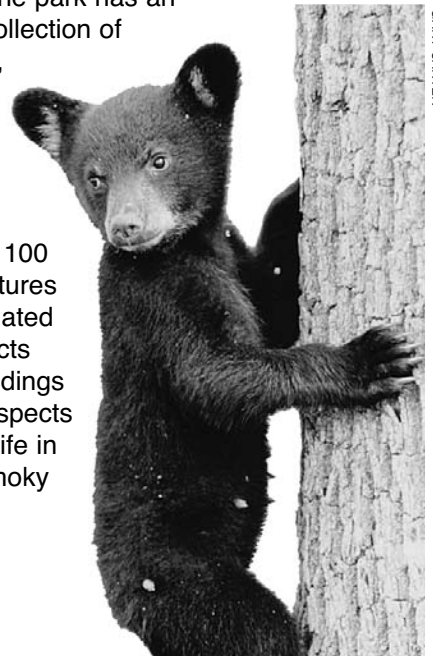
The park's wide recognition as a unique sanctuary is well deserved when one considers just a few of its features:

- Because the park contains a variety of habitats, it is home for over 1,500 species of vascular plants, 10% of which are considered rare, and over 4,000 non-flowering plant species.
- The park has more tree species than northern Europe and contains one of the largest blocks of old-growth deciduous forest in North America. Almost 95% of the park is forested, and over 20% of that area is old-growth forest. Some trees attain record size in the Smokies.

• The Smokies provide the only habitat in the world for several plant and animal species, including Cains reed-bent grass, Rugel's ragwort, and Jordan's red-cheeked salamander. Species new to the scientific community are found nearly every year, especially in the lesser studied groups such as the invertebrates.

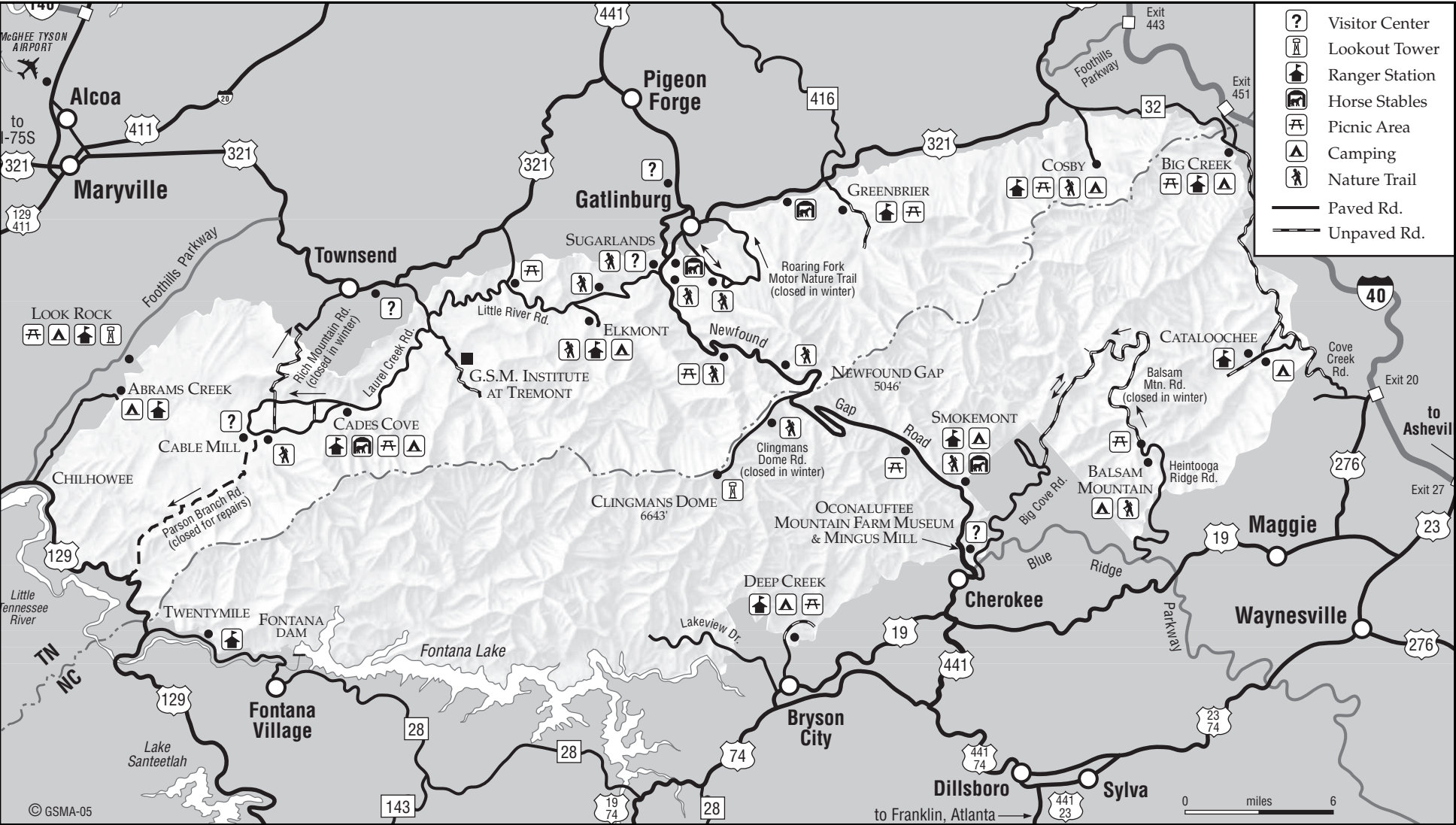
• At least 60 native mammals live in the Smokies, along with over 200 species of birds, many of which are here on a seasonal basis. There are 38 reptilian species which include turtles, lizards, and snakes. Amphibian species number 40, and of that figure 30 are salamanders. This gives the Smokies the distinction of having the most diverse salamander population anywhere in the world. Numerous species of land snails, insects, and spiders are also found in the park.

• Culturally, the park has an unequaled collection of log buildings, including homes, barns, as well as two working grist mills — over 100 historic structures in all. Designated historic districts preserve buildings that reflect aspects of everyday life in the Great Smoky Mountains.



GARY CARTER

Park Map and Visitor Information



EMERGENCIES

Listed below are some numbers to call for emergencies that arise after hours.

Park Headquarters (865) 436-1294
Cherokee Police (828) 497-4131
Gatlinburg Police (865) 436-5181

HOSPITALS

Sevier County (865) 429-6100, Middle Creek Rd. Sevierville, TN. 15 miles from Gatlinburg
Blount Memorial (865) 983-7211, US 321, Maryville, TN. 25 miles from Cades Cove.
Swain County (828) 488-2155, Bryson City NC. 16 miles from Smokemont.

REGULATIONS

Picking, digging or otherwise damaging plants is prohibited in the national park. Persons feeding wildlife are subject to \$5,000 fine and six months imprisonment.

ACCESSIBILITY

Restrooms at all park visitor centers are handicapped accessible. The Sugarlands Valley Nature Trail, just south of Sugarlands on US 441, is accessible to all visitors.

TRAFFIC CONGESTION

It is not uncommon for traffic to back up heading into Gatlinburg from the park, especially in the late afternoon. At these times, we suggest using the Gatlinburg By-pass to get to the north end of Gatlinburg or to other routes north. There are two overlooks on the by-pass that offer good views of Gatlinburg and Mt. Le Conte. The Cades Cove Loop Road is often congested, especially during the summer and fall.